

The Dispatch

The Newsletter of Fort Smith National Historic Site



Fall/Winter 2000 Vol. 2 No. 2

New and Noteworthy

Phase 2 & 3 renovation work winding down

The finishing touches are being completed on both landscaping and interior work remaining on the renovation project. Work on the third floor administrative offices continues, and is expected to be finished by early 2001.

Belle Point area Closed

On August 30th, the Fort Smith Railroad announced its decision to close the crossing to the Belle Point area of the park. A barrier is being built to prevent visitors from crossing. The problem should be resolved later this year.

Commissary Improvements

New exhibits and historic furnishings are coming soon to the commissary building. Tom and Eric designed five new wayside exhibits to showcase the complex history and uses of the building. The new exhibit panels and additional furnishings will be phased in over the fall and winter.

Historic Tree Planting

U of A professor Gerald Klingaman visited the park recently to identify the trees visible in historic photographs of the fort. This information will be used as we begin a more historic approach to landscaping on the grounds in the coming year. The first of these trees, American elms, were planted at the park on September 26th.

Execution Updates

Additional research has brought new information to light regarding several of the executions. See the article on page 4 about the execution of John Pointer. Our winter issue will include an article about our latest research on the Oct. 10, 1873 execution.



The First Ladies of Arkansas and Oklahoma at the Initial Point Marker exhibit during their visit to the park September 23rd. Mrs. Cathy Keating is on the Choctaw Nation side of the marker (left), Mrs. Janet Huckabee is on the Arkansas side of the marker (right).

Off to a Good Start!

In the first few months after reopening we have hosted over 14,200 visitors from literally every part of the globe. We have seen visitors from all fifty states except Rhode Island, Montana and New Hampshire! Our foreign visitors have been from 18 countries including India, Germany, Ukraine, Brazil, China, England, Holland, and the Netherlands.

Many of our visitors have written comments about their visit and their thoughts on our renovation. The majority of the comments are very positive about the new exhibits and overall improvements to the facility.

Great improvement since 1986. – Covina, CA

Beautiful. Makes us proud of Fort Smith – Fort Smith, AR

We enjoy the new look! – Baltimore, MD

Great! As an Oklahoma History teacher I found it very interesting. – Midwest City, OK

The Deputy Marshal video and Indian info were wonderful! – Van Buren, AR

As expected though, we have had several visitors who were disappointed with or didn't understand the changes.

Seemed more authentic & interesting

before this remodeling. – Altus, AR

Put it back the way it was! – Crestline, CA

Too Modern. Should bring back jail cell with bucket in it. – Fort Smith, AR

Great new style, but the older version was more realistic. – Fort Smith, AR

Park staff was aware that many of our previous visitors might react negatively when they saw familiar exhibits gone and

replaced with new ones. The courtroom and old jail in particular raise questions and comments by visitors. In anticipation of these questions, former Park Historian Julie Galonska prepared a site bulletin on the courtroom. Entitled, "Why Does the Courtroom Look Different?," it explains that the changes were made in order to present a more historically accurate courtroom.

The previous courtroom restoration on display from 1957 to 1997, depicted Judge Parker's Sixth Street courtroom of 1890 – 1896. The courtroom he used from 1875 to 1889, housed in the former military barracks, bore little resemblance to the more lavish Sixth Street courtroom. The current renovation presents a more accurate courtroom for the time period of 1875 to 1889 when it was located in the barracks building. Newspaper accounts, inventories, vouchers, and other written documents from the 1870s and 1880s assisted NPS historians and curators in designing the courtroom. Furnished almost entirely with reproductions, the courtroom will be available for educational use by students.

Park staff have recently prepared another site bulletin, a general guide to the Visitor Center. Included is information on the history of the barracks/courthouse/jail buildings as well as the new exhibits.

Visitor understanding and appreciation of the exhibits and changes has increased as a result of these site bulletins, and the time rangers and volunteers have spent talking to visitors.

Superintendent's Column

The first few months that we have been open has been a challenge. We still have a lot of dust and dirt in the building as the contractor tries to finish up and there are a host of things that need to be fine tuned to work correctly. Visitation has been a little disappointing but I may have been a little optimistic as to how fast people would find us again and start visiting. Unfortunately we have continued to look like we are under construction but come to an end soon. On the positive side we have had visitors from 47 different states and 18 foreign countries and the school groups are back which is always an adventure. We do hope you have all had a chance to visit, if not come on down this fall while the weather is nice and check us out.

New Year's for the federal government starts October 1 with the new budget year. We believe we will have a budget increase that will allow us to add to our programs and better maintain the building and grounds. We still have a few more things to take care of including five map exhibits and placing a prison guard mannequin on the walkways in the new jail. Gary Smith and the maintenance crew will be completing the upstairs for the ranger and administrative offices as well as the park library. We have started planting trees and shrubs and we have grass sod and seed ready for next spring. With the assistance of Professor Gerald Klingaman from the University of Arkansas we have tried to identify the trees in our historic photo collection so we can plant similar trees on the grounds. A lot of them are American elms, and as many of you know this species fell victim to Dutch elm disease about 50 years ago. They now have a very resistant variety called Valley Forge and we now have eleven of them growing, all along Third Street. The nursery that supplied them thought they would be the first

American elms planted in Arkansas in the last 50 years.

With a degree in wildlife management, I try to work with my specialty whenever possible, not always easy in a historic park. In September we installed two bat houses on the roof of the maintenance building, easily seen if you look up towards the back of the building. The Fort Smith Museum had to evict their bat colony and they asked us to provide new homes around the park, which we were happy to do for them. Each box can hold 100 bats or more. We expect to have a few more houses delivered as part of a young man's Eagle Scout project. We also purchased 16 plastic purple martin gourds and will have them up on the maintenance roof next spring. The plastic gourds are similar to what the Native Americans used in their villages and they work better than the metal houses. We are also looking at building a chimney on the maintenance building to serve as a home and roost for the dozens of chimney swifts that we had to evict from the jail and barracks when we sealed up the chimneys in that building. I am also looking for someone who might like to volunteer to work with the martins and blue birdhouses.

We always appreciate comments and suggestions, even the negative ones! If you have a comment, suggestion or problem please let us know. It is your park to enjoy.

Bill Black

Schedule of Events

November 23 - Thanksgiving Day.
Park Closed.

December 25 - Christmas Day.
Park Closed.

Children's Hands-on History Activities

Programs are offered twice: 9:30 – 11:00 a.m. and 1:30 – 3:00 p.m. Free and open to children grades 1 – 8. Dates subject to change, please call ahead for more information.

Sat. Dec. 2 Frontier Christmas
Sat. Jan. 20 Pioneer Toys

Staff Notes

Administrative Officer Chuck Shoemaker spent much of the summer on fire related details in the west. He worked on fires in the Grand Canyon, Winnemucca, NV, Santa Fe, NM and Ogden, UT as a member of the Administrative Payment Team.

Park Ranger Tom Wing spent a long weekend in early September working the Brock Creek fire in the Ozark/St. Francis National Forest. The fire was in the area of Mount Magazine.

Kevin Stiles, who started over the summer as a member of the maintenance staff, has been hired on part-time through the Student Temporary Employment Program. Besides being a student at Westark, he has been a valuable addition to the staff, and has been hard at work keeping Bill's grass green.

Preservation crew member Joe Smith retired at the end of September. During his twenty years with the Park Service, Joe worked on projects at over thirty states. His skill and wit will be missed!

Along with the reopening of the Visitor Center came the reopening of a vastly expanded Eastern National Bookstore for the park. From the 'bookstore in a closet' look of the temporary visitor center during the renovation, the park now carries approximately 550+ items, including books and educational souvenirs.

The bookstore got off to a great start with \$1500 in sales on the day of the reopening. So far this year we have sold over \$10,600.00. Not bad, considering that the park and the bookstore were closed for six months. As before, a portion of all sales from the bookstore is returned to the park for us to use in support of our interpretive programs, provide magazines and other material for the park library, etc.

Top Selling books (July to October 2000)

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1 - Fort Smith: Little Gibraltar on the Arkansas | 6 - Trail of Tears |
| 2 - Hanging Judge | 7 - Encyclopedia of Western Gunfighters |
| 3 - Law West of Fort Smith | 8 - Belle Starr and her Times |
| 4 - West of Hell's Fringe | 9 - Trail of Tears: Cornerstones of freedom |
| 5 - National Park Passport Book | 10 - Prairie Traveler by Randolph Marcy |

Eastern National has also added the park bookstore onto their sales website. You can now order our top selling items online at

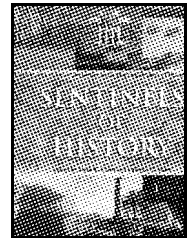
<http://www.nationalparkbooks.org/stores/index.asp?store=76>
We plan to add more of our newer items to the website over the winter. A mail order catalog is also under development to help increase sales, and reach more visitors after they have visited the park. If all goes well, look for the republication of S.W. Harman's Hell on the Border exclusive to the bookstore early next year.

And don't forget, a membership to Eastern National (\$25 annually) provides a 15% discount on all items in the bookstore.

Ranger Recommendation

Sentinels of History: Reflections on Arkansas Properties on the National Register of Historic Places.

Edited by Mark K. Christ & Cathryn H. Slater. Softcover; \$25.00



This book by the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program is a beautiful and invaluable resource for those interested in historic buildings and sites. The book contains essays showcasing 30 properties in Arkansas listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Color photographs as well as historic images accompany the essays.

Essays cover every part of the state and time periods ranging from the Toltec Mounds of 700 – 1800 to E. Fay Jones's Thorncrown Chapel of 1980. Fort Smith's image as a place "on the border" is explored in Elliot West's essay. Other places featured include: Lakeport, Arkansas's finest antebellum plantation; the Civil War battlefields of Pea Ridge and Prairie Grove; Smith Hospital, an early 20th century medical facility located in Paris; the Piggott post office depression-era mural; and Crystal River Tourist Camp in Cave City, an automobile tourist camp built around the opening of a cave.

In addition to the essays, the book contains a location map and appendix providing information, county by county, for the more than 2,000 properties in Arkansas that are listed on the National Register.

Sentinels of History would make an excellent gift, particularly for those who like to visit historic places. With its beautiful photographs and engaging essays, it will also please the armchair traveler.

Julie Northrip
Park Ranger

Featured Item

It Took Brave Men: Deputy U.S. Marshals of Fort Smith. Video Cassette; \$12.95

This film was created as part of the new exhibits inside the visitor center, and is shown in a small theatre area in the second jail reconstruction. Produced by the National Park Service, **It Took Brave Men** tells the story of the deputy force that worked for the federal court in a truthful and exciting manner. Dispelling the mythology about deputies created by Hollywood, the fifteen-minute film is both educational and entertaining.

Look for park staff member Darin Huggins' memorable cameo as one of the sleeping outlaws.



New information regarding the Execution of John Pointer, 1894.

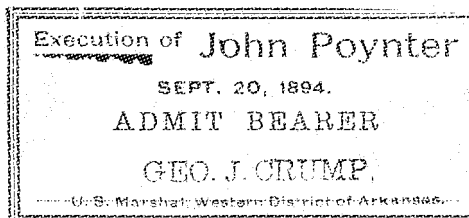
By Eric Leonard, Park Ranger

While preparing for my gallows program Sunday, September 24th, discussing the execution of John Pointer, I made a remarkable discovery and rewrote a small portion of the history of Fort Smith. The date that we have on record for the execution of John Pointer is September 24, 1894. Turns out, we had it wrong by four days. John Pointer was executed on Thursday, September 20, 1894.

In reviewing the microfilm of the *Fort Smith Elevator* in regards to the execution, I found that it was reported in two issues; September 21, 1894 and September 28, 1894. The *Elevator* was published on Fridays, but evidently went to press Thursday afternoons. The September 21 issue has an article on the execution, covering the crime and trial of Pointer, and also states the following: "Yesterday at 3:30 o'clock John Pointer was executed in the jail yard for the murder of Samuel Vandever and William D. Bolding.... The early hour at which we go to press renders it impossible to give the closing incidents of the execution in this issue." In the September 28th issue, there is an article which gives a full account of the execution itself. The article begins: "The *Elevator* was on press last week long before the wretched youth whose name heads this column was ushered into eternity. Consequently it could give none of the incidents connected with his terrible end."

The root of the error regarding the date of the execution is simple to trace - it began in S.W. Harman's *Hell on the Border*. While the book gets the date correct (September 20) in the full text on page 349, it uses the incorrect date (September 24) in the table of executions on page 174. Most authors have used the table of executions as the main source regarding the executions, so the error has simply been passed down over the years. Glenn Shirley's book, *Law West of Fort Smith*, lists the incorrect date of September 24, 1894, making this the second incorrect execution date in his book (the other being the other execution in 1894 of Lewis Holder).

A small irony to all of this is that the only execution pass or 'ticket' to have survived is one from Pointer's execution. On the pass is written the date of Sept. 20, 1894. So, in a sense, the correct date has been staring at us for 106 years. The execution information on the park's web site and other interpretive material will be changed to reflect the corrected date.



A pass to witness the execution of John Pointer. Considered the only surviving pass from any of the executions, this would have permitted the passholder to enter the gallows enclosure to witness the execution.

Web site update

Great things have been happening to Fort Smith on-line! At the end of July, the park received the honor of being the featured park on ParkNet, the NPS web-site. We remained featured through the end of October.

On Founder's Day, August 25th, a new look for the basic park pages on ParkNet debuted; a lot of work has gone into making sure that the new pages contain up-to-date information reflecting the current status of the park. The new design will allow easier updating of basic park information, such as press releases, and basic visitor information. It also is just a little bit harder to find the expanded web pages, but they are still there!

The park web pages received a grand total of 158,784 accesses in 2000. It is always surprising the kind of responses we get from the web site- just recently we received a research request from a western enthusiast in Kiel, Germany regarding deputy Paden Tolbert.

Eric is working on a full overhaul of the expanded pages, in an effort to make them a bit simpler to use. Look for the new layout to debut with added material near the end of the year.

<http://www.nps.gov/fosm/>

<http://www.nps.gov/fosm/home.htm>

Thomas S. Jesup: Father of the Quartermaster Corps

By Tom Wing, Park Ranger

Thomas Jesup was born in Berkeley County, Virginia, on December 16, 1788. His father was a distinguished Revolutionary War officer. In 1808 at the age of 20, Jesup was appointed 2nd Lt. in the 7th Infantry. In the War of 1812 he was transferred to the 19th Infantry. Jesup was awarded the brevet (or honorary) ranks of Lt. Col. and Col. for gallantry and was wounded several times. The British took him prisoner when General Hull surrendered Detroit. After the War of 1812, at the age of 30, Jesup was appointed Quartermaster General. Immediately he produced a new set of regulations for the Quartermaster Corps which addressed the many problems of military supply. Jesup was awarded a brevet rank of Major General after 10 years of efficient service and saw his department become responsible for all purchases of the Army.

In May, 1836 Jesup was transferred by President Andrew Jackson to command troops involved in the Seminole War in Georgia and Florida. He was severely wounded in the action in Florida and was mentioned as a possible presidential candidate.

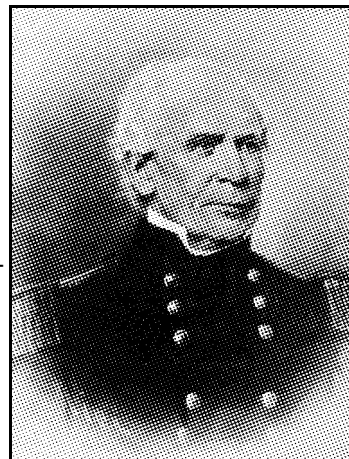
Jesup returned to his previous position as Quartermaster General in August 1839 and during this time he visited the second Fort Smith while it was under construction. General Jesup made drastic changes to the original plans for the second fort. Believing

that the fort would never come under attack, Jesup ordered the two bastions on the west side of the fort wall converted into storehouses. The Southwest bastion was converted to the Quartermaster storehouse, where tools, harnesses, equipment, and building supplies were kept while the Northwest bastion was converted to the Commissary storehouse and filled with rations for the garrison.

Jesup's decision to make the second Fort Smith a supply depot rather than a defensive post had lasting effects on the Army's role in the Southwest as well as the development of the surrounding city.

Fort Smith became the "Motherpost of the Southwest," supplying forts in Indian Territory and North Texas. This activity brought farmers and merchants to Fort Smith to provide goods and services for the Army.

General Jesup continued in his position as Quartermaster General throughout the Mexican War and died still at his post June 10, 1860. His death marked the end of 42 years at the helm of the Quartermaster Department. General Jesup remains one of the most respected and colorful soldiers of the pre-Civil War Army.



Quartermaster General Thomas Jesup

Volunteers-in-Parks update

The volunteers at Fort Smith NHS have had a busy summer. Since the reopening in June, Brian Vick, Betty Napier, Charlie Limburg, John Northrip, Betty McSwain, Liz Leonard, Judith McGee, Fred Hander, Gerald and Joyce Cokely, Rena Westbrook, and David Dunigan have assisted in the visitor center. This help was especially important during the first two weeks of operation.

The Civil War cannon crew had a busy summer, conducting programs at Arkansas Post and Wilson's Creek and also bi-monthly programs at home. The programs at Fort Smith alternated between the 2nd Kansas Battery (Federal) and the Good/Douglas Texas Battery (Confederate). Regular crew members Mike Jewell, David Dunigan, Richard Duncan, Mike Rissler, Steven and Arron Peer, Larry Puckett, Ed Potts, and Steve Klein have been joined by new recruits Herb Crossno, Joe Boster, and John Northrip. Additionally, Bob Coons, Damon Jackson and Greg Wait helped with the Wilson's Creek program. While the cannon and crew was at Wilson's Creek in August, members of the NW 15th Arkansas Infantry CSA conducted an

infantry demonstration at the park under the leadership of Alex Alexander.

Volunteer groups helped present programs at the reopening and included Arthur Street and the 1st Arkansas Light Artillery, Lee Burdine and the Frontier Battalion Signal Corps, Patric Johnstone and the Ghostriders, Bill Griggs and the NW 15th Arkansas Infantry, and Gary Robertson's Confederate Partisan Rangers. Bill Black's Sertoma Group coordinated parking during the reopening and Carol and Mecha Waters helped coordinate food and decorations. Our sincere thanks go to all of these groups and individuals for their continued support of the parks mission. Without these people, we would not be able to provide quality programs and events for the visitors.

The future is bright at Fort Smith NHS due to the efforts of our volunteers. We are currently looking for help with our park library as we prepare to move it to the 3rd floor of the Visitor Center. Other volunteer positions currently needed are: Front Desk/Visitor Services, Education Program Assistant, and Historic Garden Attendant. If you are interested in these or other volunteer positions, contact Park Ranger Tom Wing, Volunteer Coordinator.

A Rainy Reopening

Despite two rainstorms, the reopening of Fort Smith National Historic Site on Saturday, June 24th, was a great success and drew large crowds. Over 300 people were present for the dedication of the wayside panels at the new Trail of Tears overlook along the Arkansas River. Park staff spent almost three years in consultation with the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Muscogee (Creek), and Seminole tribes in preparing these panels as well as other exhibits in the visitor center. Representatives from the five tribes spoke at the unveiling ceremony.

The reopening of the visitor center began with sunny skies and presentations to a crowd of over 500 by park, local, state, and tribal dignitaries. The torrential rainstorm cut short the program, before Senator Dale Bumpers and others had the opportunity to speak. The planned ceremonial unlocking of a chain of handcuffs at the front door did not take place and instead hundreds of people quickly made their way out of the rain into the visitor center. By the end of the day, 1,866 visitors had toured the newly renovated facility.



Cherokee Chief Chad Smith receiving a framed print of the Cherokee exhibit panel from park staff member Quoya Waters during the reopening ceremony, as Superintendent Bill Black looks on.

Since the reopening, the park has installed exhibits in the "new jail" building. Visitors have enjoyed being able to see and walk through a partial, full-sized replica of the jail interior. Housed in the "ruins" of the jail cells are exhibits on the U.S. Deputy Marshals, outlaws, and conditions in Indian Territory. Our new 15-minute video on the deputy marshals can be viewed in one of the recreated jail cells.

Notes on Fort Smith History

October 15, 1817

Major William Bradford and his company of troops from the Rifle Regiment arrive at Arkansas Post. The Major is distressed that one fourth of his command is ill and decides to hold over at Arkansas Post to allow his men to recover before pushing up the Arkansas River the proposed fort site. They arrive at Belle Point December 25.

October 10, 1832

Belle Point tavernkeepers, angered by a recent federal grand jury report that accused them of illegally selling whiskey to the Indians, took out a notice in the *Arkansas Gazette* to defend themselves. The tavernkeepers called the report a gross misrepresentation and said it "cast odium unmerited and unjust on the public and citizens of Fort Smith."

October 24, 1838

Captain William Belknap's two companies (B & H) of the Third Infantry arrive at Fort Smith. Belknap's men began erecting cabins 1/2 a mile southeast of what would become the site of the second fort. The Third Infantry camp became known as Cantonment Belknap, and was operational during the eight year construction of the second fort.

September 29, 1884

U.S. Marshal Thomas Boles receives a letter from the Attorney-General's office requesting additional information on the condition in the basement jail, stating "I desire that you will furnish me with a statement of the number of prisoners usually in confinement.... Your letter should be full and complete in every particular that it may satisfy Congress of the necessity for a new jail at Fort Smith." Despite the efforts of the Department of Justice and Marshal Boles, construction of a new jail was not authorized by Congress until 1886.

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| <h2>The Dispatch</h2> <p><i>The Newsletter of Fort Smith NHS</i> Park Ranger Eric Leonard, Editor</p> | <h3>A Cute Trick: How a fine Saw found its way into the U.S. Jail.</h3> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <p>Fort Smith National Historic Site PO Box 1406 Fort Smith, AR 72902 (501) 783-3961 http://www.nps.gov/fosm/</p> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <h2>IN THIS ISSUE:</h2> <table> <tr> <td>Cover Article</td><td>.... 1</td></tr> <tr> <td>Superintendent's Column</td><td>.... 2</td></tr> <tr> <td>Fall 2000 Schedule</td><td>.... 2</td></tr> <tr> <td>Bookstore Browsers</td><td>.... 3</td></tr> <tr> <td>New Information on the execution of John Pointer</td><td>.... 4</td></tr> <tr> <td>Quartermaster General Jesup</td><td>.... 4</td></tr> <tr> <td>Reopening Recap</td><td>.... 5</td></tr> <tr> <td>Notes on Fort Smith History</td><td>.... 5</td></tr> </table> | Cover Article | 1 | Superintendent's Column | 2 | Fall 2000 Schedule | 2 | Bookstore Browsers | 3 | New Information on the execution of John Pointer | 4 | Quartermaster General Jesup | 4 | Reopening Recap | 5 | Notes on Fort Smith History | 5 | <p>One day last week a box of ready cooked provisions reached the U.S. jail, sent to Jake Standley by his wife. The food was examined by the jail officials, who found nothing wrong with it and it was accordingly sent in to its owner. A number of the prisoners were invited by Jake to partake of his feast. The food was taken from the box by the guards and handed to the prisoners. Presently one of them broke open a biscuit, inside of which he found a small tin box. In the box was a note to Jake telling him that in the box of food he would find two saws, that cost \$12.50. Now the box was on the outside and the question was how to get it inside. It was finally decided that John Fields, who had at all times continued himself excellently, and had the goodwill of the jail officials, should request that the turnkey hand him in the box, as he wanted to do some writing in his cell and would like to have it to sit on. Accordingly Fields asked for the box and it was handed in to him. He examined it, but so far as known found but one saw, a keen, bright new one about a foot long. Fields hid the saw under his slop bucket, but unfortunately for the boys, when jailer Pape went through the jail to examine the cells, as he does each day, he discovered the saw by mere accident, as he seldom disturbs the slop buckets, which stand in a niche in the wall. He locked Fields up, and used every means to induce him to tell where he got the instrument, but to no avail, and it was at once surmised that some friend had given it to him while he was out getting his photograph taken the day it was found. However, on the way to Detroit, one of the convicts who knew the whole secret told it to one of the guards, and the question with the jail officials now is what became of the second saw mentioned in the note, for if it did not get lost out of the box while in transit it must still be about the jail and a sharp lookout is being kept for it. The little tin box that contained the note had been wrapped up in the dough and the biscuit then baked around it. The saw captured is very keen and cuts steel rapidly.</p> <p><i>From the Fort Smith Elevator, July 25, 1890</i></p> |
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